

# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

**Automatic writing**  
**American sacred serpents**  
**Nazca: end of the trail?**  
**Jung and UFOs**  
**Cottingley revisited**

22





# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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## In next week's issue

In **Psychic art** we examine the extraordinary careers of three mediums who receive poems and even entire novels from writers beyond the grave. The gift of **Speaking in tongues** is well known among members of the Charismatic churches – but do they speak in any known language? **Doris Stokes** is an astonishingly successful English medium whose messages from the dead appear to be both reliable and genuine – but are they what they seem? In the first part of our series on **Leys** we describe the complex network of straight lines that links the pre-Roman sites of Britain – a network that seems too perfect to be accidental. And in **American serpents** we trace the persistent occurrence of the serpent motif in the legends of the ancient peoples of central America.

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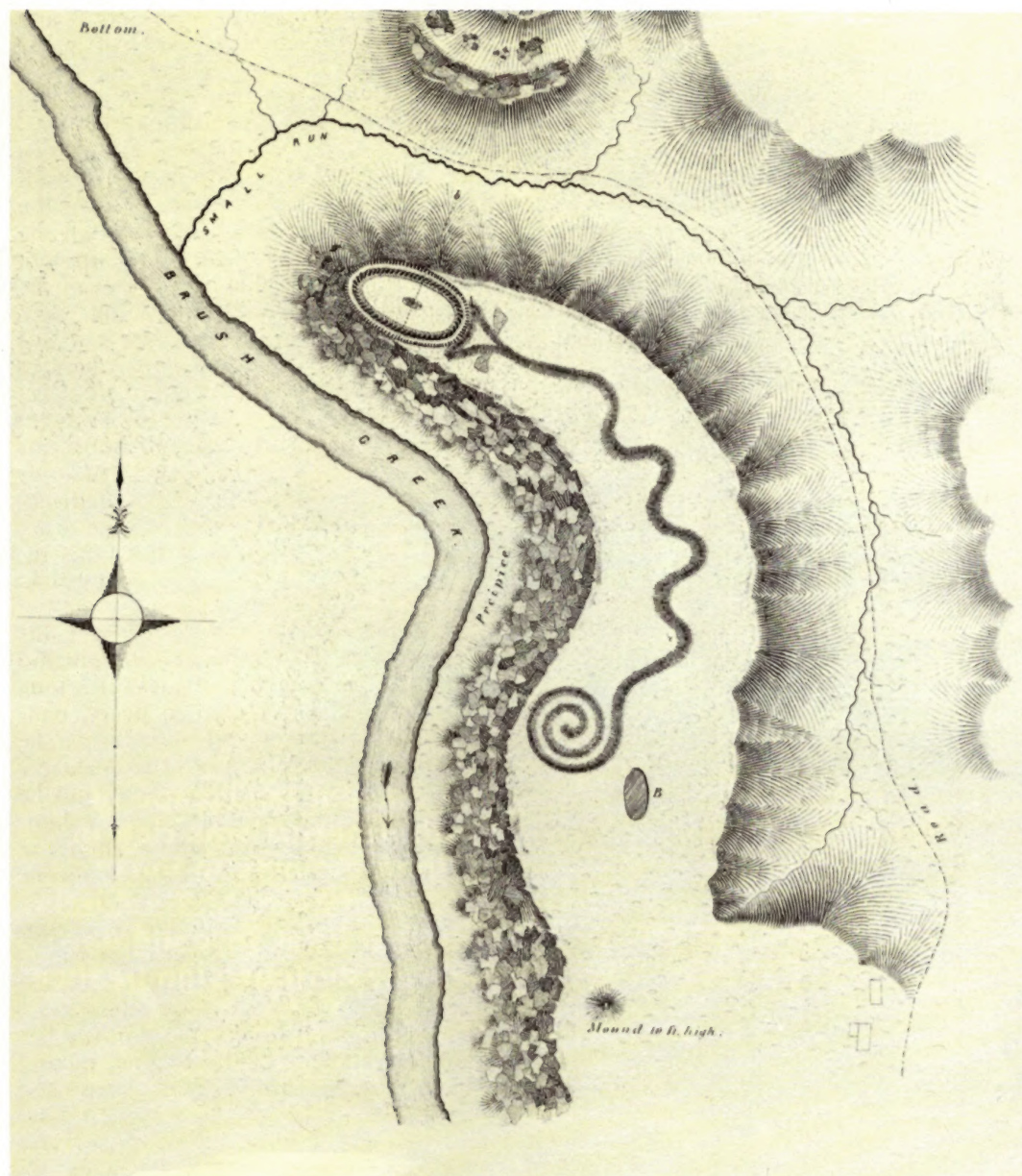


An aerial photograph of a golf course during autumn. A light-colored, winding path or fairway cuts through a dense forest of trees with yellow, orange, and brown foliage. The path forms a large, looping shape that resembles a stylized 'S' or a snake. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

# The sacred serpents of America

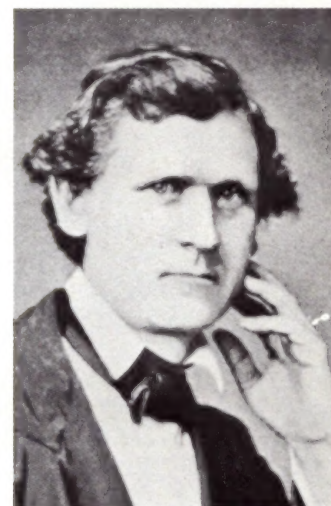
The ancient landscape of North America was rich in earthen mounds in the shapes of birds and animals. JOHN MICHELL investigates their mysterious significance





Previous page: the serpent earth mound in Adams County, Ohio, the most famous of the ancient Indian earthworks of North America. Scholars have conjectured that the motif of the serpent swallowing the egg depicts an astronomical event of religious significance

This page: an early survey of the Ohio serpent (left) made in the mid 19th century by American archaeologists Edwin Hamilton Davis (below) and Ephraim George Squier (bottom). The serpent shape can really be appreciated only from the air; Davis and Squier made their survey by carefully measuring distances along the ground



AS THE EUROPEAN SETTLERS spread westwards through the plains and woodlands and along the river valleys of central North America, they kept coming across evidence of powerful, populous civilisations that had vanished at some earlier time. Particularly on the high ground above the great rivers Mississippi, Miami and Ohio were found relics of vast ancient works in the form of earth mounds, embankments and enclosures, often spread over thousands of acres. Among them were huge artificial hills, like that at St Louis, once topped by temples. One such, discovered by early French colonists at Natchez, was still inhabited by the local tribe of Indians. They were ruled from the summit temple by a sacred king who was charged with magical power; this power was preserved by his attendants never letting him come into contact with the earth.

Strangest of all the ancient monuments in North America were those encountered by settlers in the early 19th century as they

infiltrated the Indian territories up to the Mississippi and beyond. They consisted of low mounds of earth sculpted into the shapes of giant birds, men, and real or mythical animals. Also among them were geometrical and other forms of uncertain meaning. Most of these great earth sculptures were found near the rivers of Wisconsin, with others in Iowa and Illinois and as far south as Georgia. Those that still remain are often set out in groups on high plateaux and are spread out over considerable areas.

Curiously, the shapes cannot easily be made out from ground level, and to view entire groups is impossible except from the air. Even then, many of the earth figures, being raised only a few feet (less than 1 metre) above the natural ground surface, can be seen only at certain times of the day or year, when outlined by shadow and sunlight.

The first printed reference to these ancient American mounds was in 1838. In 1848 some examples were described and figured in





the greatest of all American archaeology books, Squier and Davis's *Ancient monuments of the Mississippi valley*; but they were not widely known until 1858 when William Pidgeon, an Indian trader and an enthusiastic archaeologist and collector of Indian lore, published his *Traditions of De-coo-dah*. Pidgeon was no writer, and there is much confusion throughout his book, but it caused a sensation.

### 'Stupendous and wonderful works'

After many travels among the Indians of both North and South America, he had set up a trading post by the walls of Fort Ancient, a vast hilltop earthwork above the Little Miami River in Ohio. Learned visitors would often come to inspect these 'stupendous and wonderful works', and from them Pidgeon learned that no one had the slightest idea who had built the great American earthworks, or for what purpose. Theories abounded, involving the Lost Tribes of

Below: the Ohio serpent mound as seen from ground level. The difficulty of appreciating the design from this position has led some researchers to speculate that the ancient North American Indians may have possessed the gift of levitation

Bottom: a 19th-century artist's impression of the excavation of an Indian burial mound. This violation of their sacred sites was one of the factors that led to Indian antagonism towards the white man



Israel and vanished races of giants – and indeed there are several records of giants excavated from American mounds – but nothing had been proved, and no one had thought seriously of consulting the local Indians on the matter. Pidgeon determined to find out the truth for himself. He built himself a sailing boat, and in 1840 began a series of great inland voyages through the American continent by travelling up into Wisconsin and the Indian territories of the Winnebago and Sioux, trading and antiquity-hunting as he went.

Pidgeon sailed into an ancient American landscape that no traveller has seen since, because with settlement a great proportion of the ancient monuments and earthworks was destroyed. Many groups of effigy mounds were obliterated by the building of Madison, Milwaukee and other cities. Some were levelled by colonists who wanted no reminder of the native people they had conquered and supplanted.

As Pidgeon saw them, the ancient works were in the care of their Indian guardians and still intact. He saw the effigies, the long hilltop processions of earthen bears, panthers, lizards, turtles and giant birds; he traced out a series of mounds that formed a great serpent across the landscape, and he found and followed for great distances alignments of earthworks with animal effigies at their intersections. He also found someone who could tell him what they meant.

While surveying ancient earthworks near Prairie la Crosse on the upper Mississippi, Pidgeon attracted the attention of a venerable Indian prophet, De-coo-dah, who introduced himself as a member of the Elk nation, descendants of the original mound builders. Pleased at Pidgeon's respectful interest in his people's monuments ('A good white man,' he cried out in surprise), and disarmed by his gesture of throwing his



## American serpents

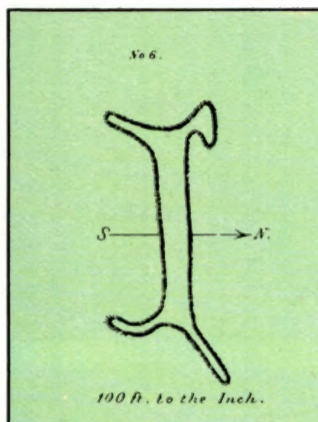
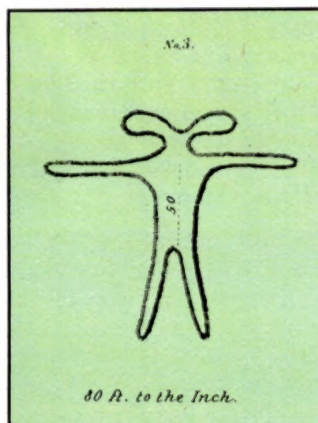
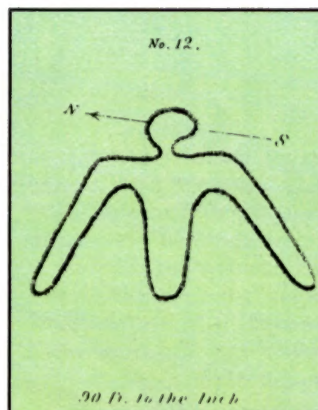
archaeologist's spade into the river with a vow never more to violate the Indians' sacred places, De-coo-dah offered to inform him about the ancient works. He imparted certain traditions to his pupil while evidently holding back many more, for Pidgeon's account of what he learned is fragmentary and far from clear. It is summed up in the words he attributes to De-coo-dah:

When this country was inhabited by my early ancestors, game was abundant and easily taken, and, consequently, they having leisure in times of peace used to write their history in figures on the earth. . . The face of the earth is the red man's book, and those mounds and embankments are some of his letters.

The idea that the effigy mounds and other great earthworks across the face of North America are ancient hieroglyphic records is one to excite the decoders of forgotten languages. It finds support in the scholarly *Archaeology in the United States* by S. F. Haven, who writes:

Wisconsin's aboriginal monuments are anomalous and strange, appearing not so much like structures for any sacred or civil purpose as like hieroglyphic or symbolic characters. If instead of being clustered on the surface of the earth they had been drawn on rocks and stones, efforts would be made to read them as records. They would derive a superior interest from the supposition that they are, as has been suggested, the 'totems' of tribes, perhaps memorials of amity or alliance, written upon the ground where adverse nations were accustomed to meet in peace. It must be confessed that pictorial writing on so immense a scale, with a sovereign state for a tablet, is a phenomenon unparalleled in monumental history.

No one has yet decoded the message of the American mounds, but it is a strange record that can only be read, whether by gods or people, from the air. Among the Wisconsin



effigies are great human-headed birds, like the thunderbirds of Indian legend or the Garuda bird, which is the agent of magical flight in the East. And along with the birds there are the serpents, reaffirming the old symbolism of the vital energy in the Universe in its two aspects, corresponding to the power of the Sun and the spirit in the earth.

### The serpent and the egg

The most famous of the serpent mounds is the effigy, 1254 feet (382 metres) in length measured along its curves, in Adams County, Ohio. An observation tower now gives visitors an overall view of this great earthen reptile, but when Squier and Davis made their fine survey of it and William Pidgeon inspected it on the instructions of De-coo-dah, they could appreciate it only by walking from the tightly curled tail and along its seven loops to the jaws, which are opened wide in the act of swallowing an egg.

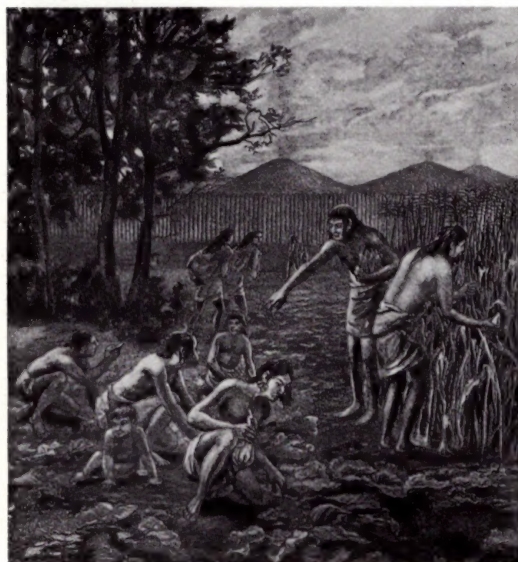
Pidgeon, who had seen other serpent mounds further west, had been told of them by De-coo-dah that

when the worshippers of reptiles were reduced by the fortunes of war, and compelled to recognize the sun, moon, and heavenly bodies as the only objects worthy of adoration, they secretly entombed their gods in the earth-work symbols which represented the heavenly bodies.

He therefore interpreted the Ohio effigy of serpent and egg as an astronomical symbol. Scholars today are inclined to agree with

Above: surveys of ancient Indian animal earthworks in Wisconsin, published by archaeologists E. G. Squier and E. H. Davis in their *Ancient monuments of the Mississippi valley* in 1848. The mounds range in height from 18 inches (50 centimetres) to 6 feet (2 metres). Few of the mounds remain today – most were destroyed by European settlers

Left: mound-builders gathering crops. It has been suggested that the mounds provided an astronomical calendar for Indian farmers







Above: effigy mounds near McGregor, Iowa. Such processions of animal figures were common in pre-Columbian North America. Experts believe that the earthworks had some religious significance

Right: the Campbell mound near Columbus in Ohio. Despite depredations, there are still many such mounds in the northern United States

Below: Walter Pidgeon, an early researcher who saw and recorded the shapes of many of the North American animal earthworks before their demolition by early European settlers



him. In 1975 T. M. Cowan of Kansas University contributed a paper, 'Effigy mounds and stellar representation', to A. F. Aveni's book, *Archaeoastronomy in pre-Columbian America*, in which he suggested that effigy mounds and other ancient earthworks were designed on the pattern of stars and constellations. A traditional image of lunar eclipse in Asia is the Moon being swallowed by a serpent, and this may be part of the meaning of the Ohio mound. But the seven loops of its body and the tightly winding tail are seen by Cowan as representing the seven stars in Ursa Minor and their annual rotation round the pole star. The connection, as he says, is 'teasingly close'.

The serpent and other such earthworks may have been used for astronomical observation and for recording astrological lore, but there is something else about their sites that cannot so easily be explained. At first sight, there seems to be no obvious reason why the Ohio serpent mound should have been placed where it is. Other neighbouring hilltops are higher, with grander views, or with greater areas of flat surface, or more accessible for the people carrying up the earth. Yet there is a certain perceptible quality to the place that the serpent seems to have been designed to express. For the serpent is the ancient symbol of the Earth

spirit: the vital current that identifies the earth as a living creature, whose magnetic centres are associated all over the world with strange atmospheres, hauntings and apparitions as well as the sacred sites of early Man.

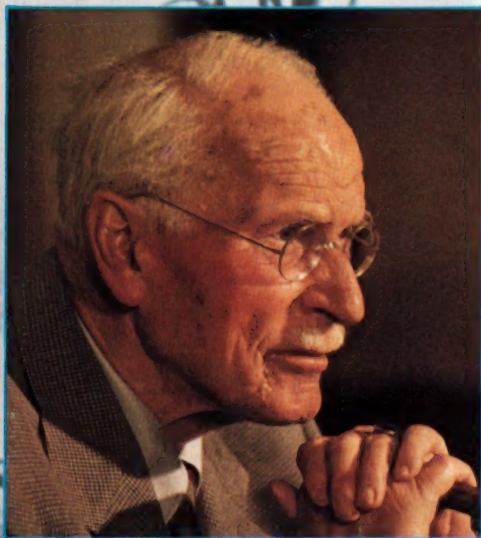
Stories of the weird experiences of locals and visitors have been told about the great serpent mound. One such report, of a literally hair-raising nature, was written for *Fate* magazine (June 1977) by a sociology professor, Robert W. Harner. As he stood alone on the serpent's head one clear, sunny day in autumn, something happened that threw him into 'the coldest, most abject, hopeless terror I have ever experienced.' Something like an evil, elemental force was present, and as Harner felt it move towards him he saw its shape in the pattern of swirling leaves cast up around it. As the leaves surrounded him, dancing ever closer, he felt himself begin to faint with horror – and then suddenly the spell was broken. The energy vortex died down, the leaves became still and Professor Harner returned to his car, promising himself that he would never venture onto the mound again. 'Perhaps', he concluded, 'they built their mound on that particular hill because very special things happen there.'

*The ancient serpent symbol is found throughout central America. See page 454*





# Symbols in the sky



**Many believe passionately that UFOs originate beyond the Earth. But, as DOUGLAS HILL explains, the psychologist C.G. Jung suggested that their true significance lies in the depths of the human subconscious**

UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS fascinated Carl Gustav Jung, the wayward genius of psychology who developed the idea of the 'collective unconscious'. Since they seemed to him to be perfect examples of his main psychological doctrines, it was natural that in 1959 he should devote a short book, *Flying saucers*, to them.

Jung was a pioneering psychoanalyst who based much of his work on the concept of *archetypes* – vastly significant symbols, motifs or figures that seem to carry much the same meaning for everyone. These symbols are liable to rise spontaneously from the depths of the unconscious, manifesting themselves in any human creation and evoking powerful emotional and imaginative responses. To understand their nature and implications, Jung marshalled an astonishing array of parallels from the areas of human activity where the 'non-rational' holds sway – religion and mythology, ancient and primitive ritual, occult systems like alchemy and astrology, and much more. At the same time, to prove that such archetypes were alive and well in the psyche of modern Man, he showed how they emerged again and again in the dreams of his patients and in the art, folklore

Above: the characteristic 'flying saucer' form is evident in this American photograph of a UFO. This sighting was clearly not a delusion, though the possibility of a fake remains. Carl Jung (inset) believed that, whatever their true nature, the power of the 'saucers' over the modern mind stems from the symbolic meaning of the disc

and popular myth of the 20th century.

The eight-year-old daughter of a psychiatrist friend, for example, had a series of dreams with striking imagery of, Jung believed, great antiquity. In one of them a horned, snakelike monster appeared, which Jung identified with a horned serpent referred to in 16th-century alchemical literature. Then, in the same dream, God 'came from the four corners' – presumably of the world, though the young girl did not make this clear. Jung relates this to ideas of a fourfold divinity antedating the concept of the Trinity, but almost forgotten since the 17th century. The little girl was drawing, as he saw it, on 'libraries' of symbolism – the archetypes – available to all mankind throughout history in the collective unconscious.

Jung believed that one of these archetypal images was the disc, of which the UFO was a modern variant. At first he put to one side the problematic question of whether what is seen in the sky is actually there. Certainly people believe that they see UFOs, just as they have believed in other 'non-pathological' visions, like the angels of Mons. Many soldiers reported having seen these apparitions during the fierce fighting accompanying the British retreat from Mons in 1914. It is an instructive parallel, for, if they were imaginary, the angelic warriors were given reality in the minds of soldiers because of the unusually powerful emotional state induced in them by the horrors of the war. People in the





Left: British soldiers in retreat from Mons in 1914 believed that angelic figures had defended them. Although this painting shows the angels as shoulder-to-shoulder with the Tommies, they were actually seen in the sky over the German forces, apparently restraining them from attacking. Soldiers on the opposing side, however, reported interventions by pro-German angels. Jung suggested that UFOs may similarly express the desires, conscious or not, of those who see them

search, with all its accompanying tensions, terrors and despairs, leads frequently to collective projections – resulting in visions, rumours, mass panics, outlandish beliefs. In them Jung delightedly discerns the visible process of the formation of a myth. (The subtitle of *Flying saucers* is *A modern myth of things seen in the sky*. A myth may be defined as ‘a story of gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon’; or, equally tellingly, as ‘a story with a veiled meaning’.) At the heart of the new myths, as of the old, lies one or more of the archetypes, providing the motive power and essential form.

### Projections and portents

So Jung is suggesting that UFOs are such myth-projections. Indeed, they may well be another herald of some current and far-reaching upheaval within the collective psyche of mankind. Some see such an upheaval foreshadowed in the current Western passion for the occult; others see it in the worldwide spread of communism; or it may be something as yet unimagined. Such transformations, throughout history, have always been accompanied by major upsurges, in religion, art and literature, of the most dominant and potent archetypes.

The flying discs or saucers, in Jung’s view, are modern versions of perhaps the mightiest archetype of all, named by Jung the ‘mandala’.

The word is Sanskrit, and the art and religion of the Hindus are filled with these symbols. But mandalas occur literally everywhere – from modern children’s art to ancient circles of standing stones, from the ring featuring in the solemn marriage ritual of the Christian church to the circles of Dante’s inferno and the marginal scrawls and

grip of such emotion, says Jung, will tend to see collective visions. And such visions will be *projections* – a key word – taking the form of some answer to their emotional needs.

In a nutshell, and to oversimplify, modern Man is ‘in search of a soul’ – as stated in the title of one of Jung’s most effective analyses of the world’s present malaise. And that



Left: a mandala forming the centrepiece of a 19th-century Buddhist painting from Nepal. It symbolises the perfection that has been attained by the eight-armed figure at its centre: a bodhisattva, which has completed its ages-long series of incarnations, but delays its entry into the bliss of Nirvana in order to aid the creatures who still suffer. A mandala also appears in the 14th-century German altarpiece (right), where it frames another being of perfect wholeness: Christ in majesty, surrounded by the Beasts of the Apocalypse and an assembly of the blessed





doodles of busy office workers. The mandala is basically a simple circle, though the variations are legion, and can include important additions like a central nucleus, or a quartering, or further concentric circles. And it carries the meaning – again to oversimplify – of a sought-after completion, totality, and *wholeness*.

That brings us abruptly back to poor suffering modern Man. We live in a 'dissociated' world – split like the mind of a schizophrenic, with little or no true communication between the parts. It is split outwardly into two monstrously threatening international blocs. The advanced technology that sustains our lives simultaneously threatens them with imminent holocaust. The darker, irrational impulses of human nature, disowned by reason and believed in the 18th and 19th centuries to have been finally vanquished by the progress of civilisation, have returned and repeatedly triumphed in the 20th.

Inwardly, too, we are split, to our grave cost. Our science and materialist values have given us our high standards of living – yet within that civilisation they have devalued all

of its parts, for a re-creation of healthy and harmonious equilibrium between them . . . that is, for wholeness. And out of that unconscious yearning, wretched, soul-starved modern Man projects mandalas everywhere, even into the sky.

It is a fascinating analysis, with some rewarding sidelights. Naturally, Jung is at pains to seek the mandala motif in places other than the 'symbolic rumours' of recorded UFO sightings, in order to prove its universality and validity. He finds it, inevitably, in dreams and modern art, and explicates these at length.

Nor does he overlook possible alternative explanations. Some of the UFO sightings or mandala dreams, he says, may carry with them elements of sexual symbology. But he is, as always, drily dismissive of the Freudian tendency to go very little further in search of understanding, having once discerned the symbolic shape of sex organs in the spacecraft of our dreams.

Far more important, for Jung, are the unique elements of the UFO-mandala, which he finds to be a variant of the archetype that is highly suitable for our time. What more likely image of a healing wholeness, for this technological age, than a mysterious machine, a piece of heavenly hardware?

### Saviours from space

Furthermore, the 'heavenly' part of the UFO projection is just as central to Jung's analysis. He was especially struck by the 'unnatural' behaviour and flight patterns of UFOs in all the reports of sightings that he studied. He had no doubt about the significance of the implication that these space-travelling mandalas are not of human origin, for those who have professed to see them. And while sometimes the observer (or dreamer) may have felt threatened, more often the UFO visitation is taken to display the existence of advanced extra-terrestrials, superpowerful and *friendly* beings from the sky, who are watching and worrying over Man's self-destructive twitchings down on planet Earth.

Jung also notes some of those occasions when people have claimed to have had closer encounters, even to have been picked up and carried briefly off by the kindly and godlike beings. He does not give much credence to these tales, but instead concludes that here the yearning for wholeness has taken on the more precise and personalised form of a longing for and dreaming of a *saviour* – some being who is more than human, who will descend to help us find the respite and healing that we cannot find for ourselves.

In this part of his analysis, Jung makes the illuminating point that 'things seen in the sky' existed throughout history, long before they took on the 20th-century guise of mysterious spacecraft out of pulp science fiction. Unnaturally mobile flying spheres, globes and discs occur prominently in annals of strange visions and inexplicable phenomena



the areas of the non-rational: the emotions, the instincts, the imagination, the religious impulses and so on. The nominally Christian world can no longer draw strength from its religious tradition; in Jung's words: 'Our myth has become mute, and gives no answers.'

We need not dwell on the description of our chronic dissociation, for Jung does not pretend that his view of a sick world is anything but obvious. It is the *effect* that matters – because dissociation causes tension, illness, monstrous deformation of the non-rational areas that have been split off and downgraded. So the dissociated mind cries out to be healed – cries out for a reunion

Above: a UFO sighting of the 16th century. In the broadsheet from which this woodcut comes, an eyewitness reports that on 7 August 1566, in Basle, 'many large black globes were seen in the air, moving before the sun with great speed, and turning against each other as if fighting. Some of them became red and fiery and afterwards faded and went out'



seen during troubled times of the past.

Again and again Jung makes the point that it matters not at all whether there actually *was* anything there, in the sky, or whether there is today. If UFOs did not and do not exist in objective reality, then they can be defined as projections of all the complex and powerful emotions described above. And if they *do* exist, they can *still* be seen as projections – just as we unconsciously project a huge burden of symbolism, with all the potency of the archetypes, onto many real items or individuals around us (like jewellery or weaponry, film stars or political leaders).

In the last analysis Jung does *not* wholly discount the possibility that there may be some objective, physical basis for the 'symbolic rumour' of the UFO. We might forgivably dismiss as dream or hallucination some of the more far-fetched tales of trips into space with tall robed beings who promise to save the world. But radar screens and cameras do not dream or hallucinate – and Jung was well aware of the solidly authenticated instances when recorded blips and photographs have seemed to confirm the existence of UFOs. As he puts it: 'Either

Right: the qualities seen in sex symbols, as in other symbols, are largely 'projected' onto them by those who hold them in awe. Moviegoers saw Marilyn Monroe as warm, soft and yielding, and Jane Russell as 'mean, moody and magnificent'. The real personalities of these screen goddesses were irrelevant to the millions whose hopes and desires they symbolically fulfilled

Below: a universally recognised symbol of power and prosperity. To millions who will never ride in one and know nothing of its qualities, the Rolls-Royce is the supreme expression of status and success



psychic projections throw back a radar echo, or else the appearance of real objects affords an opportunity for mythological projection.'

He is of course being ironic: he does not believe that psychic projections can affect radar screens. But the point has to be laboured because of the relentless urge, among the media and other defenders of the rationalist *status quo*, to take every opportunity of decrying Jung as some wild-eyed, credulous crank, hip-deep in what Freud scornfully called the 'black mud of occultism'. His detractors have consistently misunderstood and misrepresented Jung's investigations of alchemy, astrology and the 'irrational' in all its forms. Inevitably they

#### Further reading

Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and his symbols*, Aldus 1964  
*Modern man in search of a soul*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1970  
*Flying saucers*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1977

have also had a field day with their own inadequate comprehension of what he had to say about flying saucers.

Jung, conversely, always persisted in keeping his mind open to an enormous range of material that might in some way contribute to furthering his understanding of the human unconscious. He perceived and analysed, towards this end, the symbolic relevance of the UFO.

But he also perceived that, in all the continually amassing reports on and studies of UFOs, there remained a core of 'hard' data that could only make sense if there were real objects up there, even if they were misinterpreted by those who saw them.

In the years after the publication of his book on flying saucers, Jung was often in touch with one of his nieces in Switzerland, who is something of an expert in her own right on UFO sightings. And according to Gordon Creighton of *Flying Saucer Review*, Jung came to move even more firmly beyond the position that UFOs might be 'merely' symbolic projections of a powerful archetype. Whatever our unconscious wishes might make of them, whatever effects they might have upon the depths of our psyches, Jung apparently grew more and more firmly convinced that there was something very real behind the phenomena.

Jung did not see himself as a prophet, in any sense, but as a psychologist, a scientific observer. Yet history is full of instances where a scientist, from objective study and observation, has 'prophetically' perceived a truth at which his blinkered contemporaries, without examining the data, continue to scoff. Will Jung's view of the UFO one day prove to be another example?



# Nazca: end of the trail?

**Astronomers and archaeologists have used the most modern techniques to try to crack the Nazca 'code', but, asks TONY MORRISON, are they any nearer to an understanding of the markings on the desert?**

COULD THE NAZCA DESERT MARKINGS represent a gigantic ancient computer? Could they – as one controversial theory has it – be an astronomical calculator like Stonehenge? Or is the answer much much simpler?

Professor Paul Kosok, pioneer researcher into the mystery of Nazca, remained convinced of an astronomical explanation for the desert 'drawings' until his death in 1959. For him, the moment of revelation had come when he saw the sun set precisely along one of the straight lines on 22 June – the winter solstice in the southern hemisphere. It seemed too much of a coincidence – and

Below: the 'fingers' of a giant lizard, cleaned by Maria Reiche. A member of the research team stands on the lines to show their enormous scale

Maria Reiche, an astronomer herself, believes she has discovered many other astronomical alignments among the hundreds of lines. However, this theory remains tantalisingly unproven.

Professor Kosok's life's work *Land, life and water in ancient Peru* deals with the importance of some form of calendrical device to primitive agricultural peoples who needed to know when to sow crops and when to harvest them. Also, the Nazcans, being a desert-dwelling people, practised irrigation – and so it was essential for them to have some way of anticipating the rise and fall of their few life-giving streams. Such significant knowledge was probably jealously guarded by an immensely powerful priesthood. Throughout the ancient world priests were also astronomers and astrologers who held the people in awe of their 'magic'.

When Professor Kosok left Nazca to pursue other research, Maria Reiche stayed on alone, fascinated by the seemingly endless





questions posed by the strange lines. What purpose did the piles of stones serve, that have lain between the lines for centuries? Fraulein Reiche favours the theory that, as the 'drawings' were – according to her researches – clearly etched into the desert by people with sound mathematical knowledge, the stones probably represent some kind of primitive calculating device, like an abacus. A simpler explanation is that each pile is the

Below: surveyors of Gerald Hawkins's team map the site of the lines on the Pampa de San José in 1968. Having proved that Stonehenge was built as an astronomical computer, Hawkins turned his attention to the Nazca lines, believing their purpose to be similar

result of one man's labour as he cleared away the desert surface to make the lines.

Yet calculations, simple or complex, are inextricably involved with Nazca. In 1968 the American astronomer Gerald S. Hawkins turned his attention to the mysterious markings. His revolutionary theories about the purpose of Stonehenge – that it was a sophisticated astronomical computer – had already outraged conventional archaeologists. When his interest in Nazca became known, it was naturally expected that his findings would simply confirm the Kosok-Reiche astronomical 'calendar' theory about the purpose of the lines.

Once and for all, Hawkins was determined to sort out the claims and counter-claims made for the 'astronomical calendar' of Nazca – and he used a distinguished team of experts and sophisticated computer techniques to do so. A team of computer experts from the Smithsonian Institution Observatory in Arequipa, southern Peru, and professional surveyors and photographers from the Peruvian Air Force worked together to





## Nazca

evaluate data for the Nazca programme.

For years Maria Reiche had been making laborious calculations 'by hand' – but with a space-age computer the same calculations could be made in a matter of seconds. (Indeed, Hawkins estimated that if all the calculations involved in this exercise were made by conventional mathematics they would take over 50 years.)

The data used were taken from a set of specially drawn maps showing the site of the greatest concentration of markings and the cleared areas on the Pampa de San José. The computer programme was basically the one used for the Stonehenge project, but with special adjustments for the latitude of Nazca. The programme was designed to pinpoint the exact position of the Sun at key times, such as its midwinter setting or its midsummer rising, in relation to the lines. A special sub-routine was incorporated into the Nazca programme to show up any correlations between positions of stars and the desert markings. The information fed into the computer about the lines was taken from 72 of the straight lines and details of the direction in which 21 of the 'arrows' are pointing. The computer would pick out significant astronomical alignment. So do the lines, in fact, point to anything in the sky?

The answer came swiftly – there was no significant correlation between the Nazca lines and figures and any heavenly body. This was not the result Hawkins had expected – nor, indeed, the result his critics expected him to come up with.

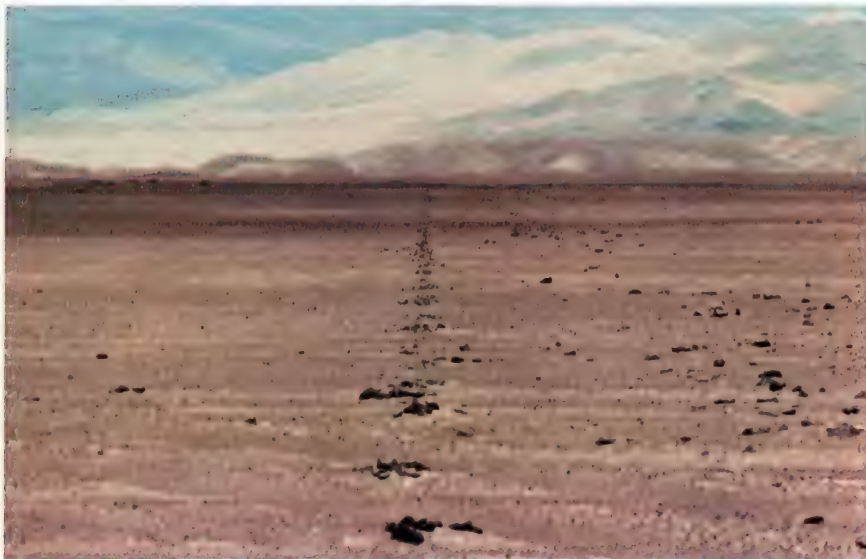
It is true that a few of the lines do point to the winter and summer positions of the Sun, but that hardly invests the entire Nazca 'zoo' with the status of a sophisticated observatory. So the followers of Reiche and Kosok found themselves believing in the 'Nazca calendar' almost as a matter of faith.

But research into Inca history reveals a primitive but highly practical grasp of astronomy. Professor Tom Zuidema of the University of Urbana, Illinois, is an expert



Left: three parallel paths leading from a Bolivian mountain village. The tracks, which had been cut through a mass of low bushes, originally led to holy shrines and are in regular use today as common footpaths

Below: a line of stone piles on the Pampa de Media Luna, in the Santa Cruz Valley on the Peruvian coast. They may have been used as primitive counting devices or as shrines, or may simply be detritus from the process of scraping away the surface of the desert to make the lines



on the Inca method of staking out a simple 'calendar' with markers on the horizon to the east and to the west of their capital city, Cuzco. As the seasons progressed the positions of the setting Sun were carefully marked on the horizon and stone towers were set up for future reference. In this way the Incas would know when it was the appropriate season for sowing, planting or harvesting. Surviving documents explain how these seasons were celebrated with colourful festivals and religious rituals.

Dr Zuidema theorises that the possible calendrical significance of the horizon markers could well also be involved in the extensive Inca system of religious shrines. These were arranged in orderly lines called *ceques*, originally in groups of 40 or 41 around one central shrine, like the spokes on a wheel. But in practice this tidy system has broken down and some *ceque* lines appear to have been laid instead between simple landmarks such as springs, hills or outcrops of rock. Perhaps these natural 'shrines' once had a religious significance in the same way that the alleged key points along a European ley line (such as wells, copses or churches) are said to have been considered 'magical'.

Zuidema believes that the Incas' agricultural astronomy was closely tied to their religion, and that therefore the positioning of their shrines may well also have had astronomical significance.

Gerald Hawkins, who (not unnaturally after the results of the computer experiment)





was inclined to dismiss any idea of Nazca's astronomical significance, still felt that there may be a connection, however obscure, between the *Incas'* astronomical knowledge and the Nazca lines. The work on the Inca *ceques* and shrines seemed to open up new and promising fields for research – for the Incas came seven centuries after the Nazcans and some vestige of Nazcan practice or belief may have been incorporated into the Inca way of life. But are the Nazca lines originals pure and simple – mysterious, historical 'one-offs'?

In 1968 the author investigated remarkably similar lines in the highlands of Bolivia – equally intriguing, and offering almost as few clues. The Bolivian lines, some of them more than 20 miles (32 kilometres) long, were as undeviating as their Peruvian counterparts. Both examples of this extraordinary practice deviate less than a few yards over the distance of a mile (1.6 kilometres), and follow their almost perfectly straight courses across hills and valleys, cutting across natural obstacles – such as dry gulches – unswervingly. They seem to connect obvious landmarks, though the principle behind this is far from obvious. Many of the newer lines converged on low mounds or hills – and although the so-called 'landing grounds', or clearings (beloved of Von Däniken and his followers), were not immediately apparent from the air, they do exist as natural 'shrines' dedicated to spirits sacred to the locality.

The Bolivian lines were discovered by the

Above: a straight path cut through Bolivian bushland, used by pilgrims on their journeys between holy shrines. The paths also provide a direct route for ordinary travellers crossing the desert

French anthropologist Alfred Métraux in the 1930s. He was particularly intrigued by their perfect straightness and the number of little chapels or shrines where the lines ended.

Even today the mountain people of the Andes build stone 'altars' or wayside shrines (something like Scottish or Irish cairns) for sacrifices to their gods or as repositories for offerings.

Ancestor worship is still important to the Indians of Bolivia – and may have been central to the religion of the builders of those strange lines, both in Peru and Bolivia. It has been suggested that some of the shrines dotted along the lines were constructed as markers of the position of the Sun at the moment a certain member of the family died. Perhaps they believed it marked the direction of the passage of his or her soul.

The Andean peasants still use the lines as paths to their sacred shrines and also for easy access to other villages across the desert. But the original purpose of these lines is unlikely to be determined so many years after their construction.

So are we being too sophisticated in our search for the purpose of the South American – and in particular, the Nazca – lines? Is the real problem our own 20th-century inability to understand ancient Man's deeply personal relationship with his gods? Perhaps he built the most perfectly straight lines to guide pilgrims between shrines, and deliberately created a two-dimensional 'zoo' that was so special only his gods could see it.

#### Further reading

Tony Morrison, *Pathways to the gods*, Harper & Row (New York) 1978  
 Maria Reiche, *Mystery on the desert* (Lima) 1949  
 Ronald Story, *The space gods revealed*, New English Library 1978  
 Jim Woodman, *Nazca – the flight of Condor I*, John Murray 1980



# The Cottingley fairies revisited



Above: the young Elsie Wright's watercolour *Fairies flying over a cottage*. She often painted fairies, because, she said, she often saw them



Left: an illustration from *Princess Mary's gift book*, which was very popular in 1914. These fairies bear some resemblance to those allegedly seen and photographed at Cottingley

**Ever since two young girls took 'fairy photographs' in the 1920s controversy has raged over their authenticity. JOE COOPER describes their reaction to questions put over 50 years later**

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPH of fairies taken by Elsie Wright of Cottingley, near Bradford, in 1917 has threatened to become overexposed in the occult-conscious late 20th century, for the photograph of the sprites pictured in front of a pleasant-faced Frances has been reproduced so often that it is in danger of becoming a sort of visual cliché. It is especially irritating to those who find the whole fairy business distasteful, even fraudulent; they object, shrilly at times, to the strangely artificial look of the fairy dancers – although they are less vocal on the other four photographs that were subsequently taken. The believers, as always, believe, and speak of 'more things in Heaven and Earth . . .'

The position of critics on the one hand and champions on the other may be summed up thus:

The 'prosecution' points out that Elsie painted and drew well, that she had always seemed immersed in drawing fairies, had been fascinated by the art of photography and had worked at a photographer's, and seemed suspiciously evasive in the 1971 BBC-TV *Nationwide* interview. Both Elsie and her cousin Frances admit to a strong sense of humour; both admit to having deceived the medium Geoffrey Hodson during the 1921 investigation (in terms of giving overgenerous endorsements to his descriptions of teeming fairy life in and around the beck). No third party was ever present when the five photographs were taken. The girls spent hours together playing down at the beck, which was well away from the house and concealed, by 40-foot (12-metre) banks, from public view. They shared a fair-sized attic bedroom in which they could have hatched their plots. In 1978 the 'Amazing Randi' (a professional American stage illusionist and self-appointed debunker of all paranormal phenomena) and a team from *New Scientist* subjected the photographs to 'enhancement' – a process used to bring out greater detail from Moon photographs – and thought they could see strings attached to some figures. Randi also pointed out that the figures in the first photograph bore a resemblance to those in an illustration in *Princess Mary's gift book*, published in 1914.

The 'defence' asserts that Elsie's job at the photographer's lasted only six months and amounted to running errands and cleaning up prints. She drew fairies because she saw





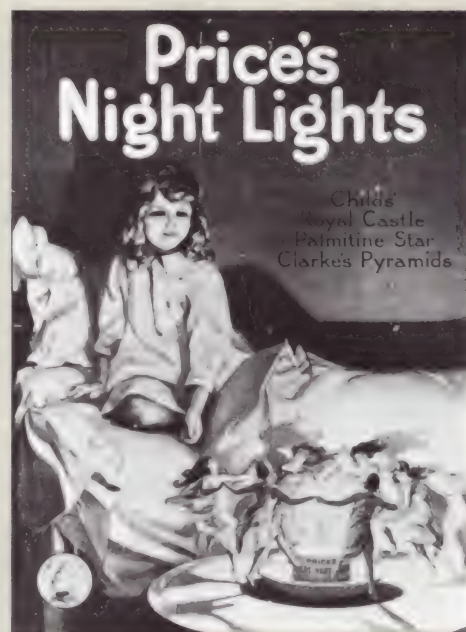
Most people do not believe in fairies and therefore, to them, any alleged fairy photographs must be fakes. To sceptics there is no question about it: the Cottingley fairies were cut out of a children's book and superimposed, very cleverly (for no one has conclusively proved that they were faked), on photographs of the cousins, Elsie and Frances.

There was no shortage of material had they wanted to search for fairy 'models'. Fairies were common enough in children's books around the turn of the century. Most girls of their age, living at that time, could have described a fairy, for most illustrations reflected a similar, traditional fairy image.

In fact, Elsie and Frances's fairies were, if anything, slightly more fashion-conscious than, say, those pictured in the popular *Princess Mary's gift book* of 1914. The Cottingley fairies had up-to-the-minute bobbed hair and beaded Charleston dresses (although Elsie's nome remained traditionally grotesque).

When psychical researcher E.L. Gardner visited Cottingley in the 1920s

Several critics pointed out that the Cottingley fairies looked suspiciously similar to those featured in the advertisement for Price's night lights (above right). One sceptic, William Marriott, produced this deliberate fake (above left) by superimposing the 'night light' fairies on a picture of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



Some fairies of the era:  
Left: fairies dancing, by E. Gertrude Thomson from William Allingham's *The fairies* (1886)

Above: a ring of fairies from Florence Harrison's *In the fairy ring* (1910)

Above right: a girl with fairies, from *Princess Mary's gift book* (1914)

he claimed mediumistic powers for both girls, but especially for Frances. He believed that the elemental spirits – fairies – used loosely-knit ectoplasm emanating from the girls with which to form visible bodies, visible, that is, only to the girls and the eye of the camera. The exact form they took was, he hazarded, 'chosen' by the subconscious minds of the girls, hence the strange mixture of traditional and contemporary. But, for whatever reason, both girls stopped seeing fairies after 1921.



them often and, anyway, her drawings were no better than might be expected from a fairly talented 16-year-old. As for the *Gift book* illustrations – fairies dancing around are bound to resemble each other and the ones in the Christmas 1914 publication lack wings. The string in the report in *New Scientist* of 3 August 1978 may be printing streaks, and even real figures would not stay absolutely motionless in the breeze that usually blew gently down the beck; and where might they be hung from? And what variety of invisible 'string' was used at the time? By the time Hodson came they were bored and nodded confirmation for the sake of peace and quiet. Elsie prevaricated because she wanted the matter to be forgotten. They did not have the motivation, materials, time, privacy, or expertise to fake the photographs. And, most significantly, they have always maintained they saw fairies and photographed them.

Newspapers, magazines and television companies have become increasingly interested in Elsie and Frances since Peter Chambers of the *Daily Express* discovered where Elsie lived in 1966. He quotes Elsie as saying that the fairies might have been 'figments of

Below: *Fairies by a stream*, a watercolour by Elsie Wright. She and her cousin were obsessed with fairies when they were young and this obsession is used by both the 'defence' and the 'prosecution' to explain the photographs. The sceptics use it to explain the motivation behind the 'fakes' and the believers claim that the obsession arose quite naturally because the girls saw fairies all the time



my imagination'. She may have made this rather bald statement simply to rid herself of unwelcome publicity. On the other hand she may have implied that she had successfully photographed these 'figments' of her 'imagination'. Significantly, in the years since the Cottingley fairies were photographed, research into 'thoughtography' (notably Dr Jule Eisenbud's work with Ted Serios in the United States) and experiments in Japan have indicated that thoughtforms may indeed be photographed.

### Elsie and Frances interrogated

For five years Elsie managed to avoid publicity; then, in 1971, BBC-TV's *Nationwide* programme took up the case. For 10 days she was interrogated, taken back to Cottingley and subjected to this sort of thing:

*(The interviewer points out that, since the original fairy investigator, E. L. Gardner, died the year before, Elsie might wish to be more explicit.)*

*Elsie:* I didn't want to upset Mr Gardner . . . I don't mind talking now . . .

*(It is then suggested that Elsie's father had a hand in matters.)*

*Elsie:* I would swear on the Bible father didn't know what was going on.

*Interviewer:* Could you equally swear on the Bible you didn't play any tricks?

*Elsie (after a pause):* I took the photographs . . . I took two of them . . . no, three . . . Frances took two . . .

*Interviewer:* Are they trick photographs? Could you swear on the Bible about that?

*Elsie (after a pause):* I'd rather leave that open if you don't mind . . . but my father had nothing to do with it I can promise you that . . .

*Interviewer:* Have you had your fun with the world for 50 years? Have you been kidding us for 10 days?

*(Elsie laughs.)*

*Elsie (gently):* I think we'll close on that if you don't mind.

More objective was Austin Mitchell's interview for Yorkshire Television in September 1976. On the spot where the photographs had allegedly been taken, the following dialogue took place:

*Mitchell:* A rational person doesn't see fairies. If people say they see fairies, then one's bound to be critical.

*Frances:* Yes.

*Mitchell:* Now, if you say you saw them, at the time the photograph was taken, that means that if there's a confidence trick, then you're both part of it.

*Frances:* Yes – that's fair enough – yes.

*Mitchell:* So are you?

*Frances:* No.

*Elsie:* No.

*Frances:* Of course not.

*Mitchell:* Did you, in any way, fabricate those photographs?

*Frances:* Of course not. You tell us how she could do it – remember she was 16 and I was





10. Now then, as a child of 10, can you go through life and keep a secret?

The Yorkshire Television team, however, believed the 'cardboard cutout' theory. Austin Mitchell duly appeared on the screen, personable as ever, with a row of fairy figures before him set against a background of greenery. He flicked them around a little (perhaps to reassure viewers that elementals had not invaded the prosaic surroundings of Kirkstall Road, Leeds).

'Simple cardboard cutouts,' he commented on the live magazine programme. 'Done by our photographic department and mounted on wire frames. They discovered that you really need wire to make them stand up – paper figures droop, of course. That's how it could have been done.'

But quite apart from the pronouncements of critics and champions, tapes, letters and newspaper cuttings are now available for anyone who would delve deeper into the fairy photographs. Understandably, Elsie and Frances would rather people kept away and respected their privacy after the passage of so many years.

The critics – Lewis of *Nationwide*, Austin Mitchell of Yorkshire TV, Randi, and Stewart Sanderson and Katherine Briggs of the Folklore Society – all these are fair-minded individuals interested in balancing probability on the available evidence. This extremely delicate balance did seem to have shifted in favour of the ladies' honesty during

Above: a rare 'cup and ring' stone, found in Cottingley Glen, close to the beck. Such strangely marked stones are traditionally associated with supernatural activities and have often been linked with fairy sightings

the 1970s but, obviously, many points could still be elucidated by further research.

Austin Mitchell said 'a rational person doesn't see fairies', and there are some sociologists who would say that rationality might be socially constructed. One's 'rationality' mostly depends on one's personal experiences and one's reading. There are, believe it or not, hundreds of instances of people claiming to have seen fairies. A perusal of Conan Doyle's book *The coming of the fairies*, or *Visions or beliefs* by Lady Gregory and the poet W. B. Yeats, should prove that more than a handful of such claims have been made.

The author has now met seven people who claim to have seen nature spirits. One of them, an ex-wrestler of powerful build – an unlikely figure to consort with sprites – is adamant in his assertions. It is interesting to note how many are prepared to listen to him with an unusual degree of tolerance.

It is usually possible to demolish individual accounts; taken collectively, however, some patterns begin to emerge. F. W. Holiday in his book *The dragon and the disc* likens the appearance of the Cottingley gnome to that of Icelandic Bronze Age figures, and William Riley, the Yorkshire author, puts the five fairy pictures into perhaps the most relevant context: 'I have many times come across several people who have seen pixies at certain favoured spots in Upper Airedale and Wharfedale.'

#### Further reading

Katherine Briggs, *An encyclopedia of fairies*, Pantheon Books (New York) 1976  
 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The coming of the fairies*, Hodder and Stoughton 1922  
 E. L. Gardner, *Fairies*, The Theosophical Publishing House 1945



# The art of automatic writing



**Only very rarely does automatic writing produce anything like literature. When a genius of Shakespeare's stature 'comes through', the results are bound to be fascinating. LYNN PICKNETT discusses the technique and examines the claims made for it**

AUTOMATIC WRITING is still a matter of intense interest among psychologists and parapsychologists alike. Not all occurrences of automatic script are as difficult to explain away as the remarkable case of Patience Worth (see page 406). A leading British psychical researcher and scientist, Professor Arthur Ellison, has said: 'I expect a third of the population of England could produce some form of automatic writing – but the results would be mostly gibberish.'

Anyone can try an experiment by resting a pen lightly on a blank page, diverting their attention from it and letting the pen do what it will. It used to be assumed that automatic script must be the product of discarnate entities, desperate to communicate and grateful for the opportunity to take command of a pen. The only question in believers' minds was: 'Is the communicator an Earth-bound spirit or a spirit sent by God?' But the scribbles produced in automatic writing can reveal a great deal, if not about the spirit world, then certainly about the subconscious mind of the pen-holder.

In the first three decades of the 20th century automatic writing was in fact used as a tool in diagnosing and treating mental

Above: William Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In 1947 a medium named Hester Dowden allegedly communicated with Shakespeare (seated centre) and other Elizabethans through automatic writing. She was told that the plays attributed to Shakespeare were in fact a group effort. Among the contributors were Francis Beaumont (standing third from left), John Fletcher (seated third from left) and Francis Bacon (seated at the end of the table)

disturbances. Dr Anita Mühl was a pioneer of this particular method of encouraging patients to express spontaneously their hidden conflicts.

The beginner in automatic writing may have to be very patient (and suffer writer's cramp before a single word has been written), for it can take hours before the pen begins to move, seemingly of its own accord. Some people never achieve automatic writing; many get meaningless squiggles or jumbles of letters; but a very few get coherent, intelligent and apparently purposeful messages, sometimes in handwriting distinctly different from their own.

An ex-clergyman, William Stainton Moses, was a medium in the latter part of the 19th century who 'specialised' in automatic script, although he could produce these automatisms only while in a self-induced trance. From 1872 to 1883 he filled 24 notebooks with trance-inspired writings, mingled with 'spirit writings', some signed. (Mendelssohn allegedly appended his signature to a page of Moses's script.)

If one takes a sceptical view, certain 19th-century religious works were not directly dictated by angels or by God, as alleged, but were the result of automatic writing by the 'prophets'. *The book of Mormon*, for example, was purportedly dictated by an angel called Moroni to a New York State farm boy, Joseph Smith, in 1827. It was written in a style similar, but inferior, to that of the King James Bible. It is not necessary to believe



that Joseph Smith was a liar to doubt that *The book of Mormon* is the word of God.

One early case of automatic writing that is still considered unique is that which involved William T. Stead, a leading British Spiritualist of the late 19th century, and a certain friend who communicated with him automatically through his pen. What is remarkable about this particular case is that the friend was alive at the time. The story goes as follows in Stead's own words:

A friend of mine . . . was to lunch with me on the Wednesday if she had returned to town. On the Monday afternoon I wished to know about this, so taking up my pen I asked the lady mentally if she had returned home. My hand wrote as follows: 'I am sorry to say that I have had the most unpleasant experience, which I am almost ashamed to tell you. I left Haslemere at 2.27 p.m. in a second-class compartment in which there were two women and a man. At Godalming the women got out and I was left alone with the man. He came over and sat by me. I was alarmed and pushed him away. He would not move, however, and tried to kiss me. I was furious and there was a struggle, during which I seized his umbrella and struck him with it repeatedly, but it broke, and I was afraid I would get the worst of it, when the train stopped some distance from Guildford. The man took fright, left me before the train reached the station, jumped out and took to his heels. I was extremely agitated, but I kept the umbrella.'

Stead dashed off a sympathetic note to the lady, explaining the reasons for his solicitude, and – being a thorough investigator – asked her to call, bringing with her the broken umbrella as evidence. She replied in some perturbation, saying she had intended



Above: American psychical researcher Dr J.B. Rhine, who believed that most automatic writings can be explained as the spontaneous expression of subconscious conflicts

Below left: William Stainton Moses, a 19th-century medium who claimed to have received numerous messages from the spirit world through automatic writing. One of his scripts (below), dated 1874, was 'signed' by Mendelssohn – who died in 1847

Below right: Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. According to medium Hester Dowden, Oxford wrote the lyrical and romantic passages of 'Shakespeare's' plays, and was the author of most of the sonnets

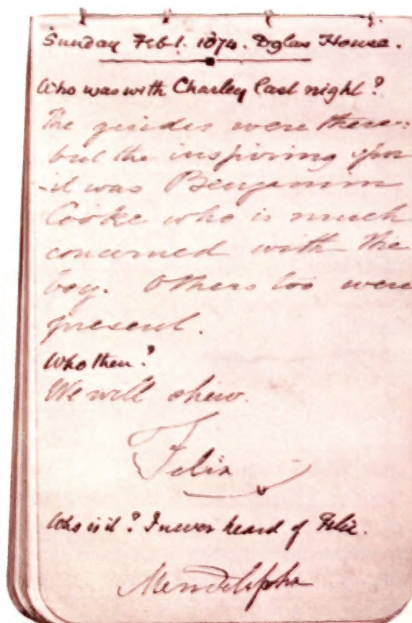
never to mention the incident to anyone. However, she added, one point in his account of her misadventure was wrong – the umbrella was hers, not her assailant's.

A great American psychical researcher of modern times, Dr J. B. Rhine, was inclined to dismiss automatic writings as spontaneous 'motor automatisms' or, as previously hinted, the outward expression of subconscious conflicts, obsessions or repressions. There seems little doubt that he and his like-minded colleagues are right in this appraisal of much automatic writing. But Dr Rhine admitted that some cases – that of Patience Worth, for example – are not so easily dismissed.

A provocative case of automatic writing occurred in 1947, through the mediumship of Hester Dowden, who had for many years been famous for the automatic scripts that she produced, even when blindfolded. Percy Allen, an author, sat with her while she held written 'conversations', allegedly with Elizabethan dramatists. As a result of these seances Mr Allen believed he discovered the answer to the tantalising question 'Who was Shakespeare?' Was he really Francis Bacon? Lord Oxford? Or perhaps was William Shakespeare just William Shakespeare?

Mrs Dowden claimed she received written information on the matter from those three gentlemen, and also from other Elizabethans involved in the writing or staging of plays. Mrs Dowden's communicators explained that the 'Shakespeare' plays were a group effort. Shakespeare and Lord Oxford were the principal contributors, while Beaumont and Fletcher, famous as the authors of many other plays, occasionally provided additional material. Bacon acted as a kind of stern script editor.

Each did what he was good at: Shakespeare created many of the stronger characters, both comic and tragic, such as Iago and Falstaff,





and he had a talent for dramatic construction, which the others willingly used. Lord Oxford, on the other hand, created the 'honeyed Shakespeare' by writing the lyrical and romantic passages.

Mrs Dowden was similarly informed that it was Lord Oxford who penned the majority of the sonnets. He also 'dictated' three new ones to her.

Bacon reiterated time and again to Mrs Dowden that the body of literature that the world knows as Shakespeare's was a group effort. Will of Stratford himself allegedly told Mrs Dowden:

I was quick at knowing what would be effective on stage. I would find a plot (*Hamlet* was one), consult with Oxford, and form a skeleton edifice, which he would furnish and people, as befitted the subject . . . I was the *skeleton* of the body that wrote the plays. The flesh and blood was *not* mine, but I was *always* in the production.

Of course, automatic literature may be a dramatisation of a deep or repressed creativity, finding expression through a means we can so far only guess at. After all, many writers and artists over the centuries have 'listened' to their 'muse'. Often whole plots, scenes or minutely observed characters have 'come unbidden' to writers, dramatists, poets. Often, when Charles Dickens was dozing in his armchair, a wealth of characters would appear before him 'as it were, begging to be set down on paper'. Samuel Taylor Coleridge dreamed the whole of his poem *Kubla Khan* and would have written it all down for posterity had not someone known to history only as 'a person from Porlock' called casually and put most of it out of his mind forever. Mary Shelley dreamed *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson came to rely on his dreams for his stories, including



Above: a 19th-century engraving entitled 'Charles Dickens's legacy to England'. Dickens said that many of his characters simply appeared before him while he was dozing, almost as if they had a life of their own

the allegorical Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. When such a writer as Charles Dickens says a tale 'wrote itself', however, we can only assume he did *not* mean his pen shot across the paper inscribing, of its own accord, *Oliver Twist*. Inspiration is in practice very different from the process of automatic writing.

Somewhere between the two, perhaps, lay the strange case of Patrick Branwell Brontë. He was an unfortunate and unsympathetic character, famous mainly for his inability to hold liquor and laudanum, or to cope with sharing an isolated house on the moors with his eccentric sisters Charlotte, Emily and Anne. He had literary pretensions, which came to nothing. However, during one of his brief periods of humble employment (as a railway clerk) he discovered that he could compile the week's railway accounts with one hand, while his other, quite independently, began to scrawl. First the name of his beloved dead sister, Maria, appeared; then came other fragments – some prose, some poetry. He later claimed to have written an alternative version of *Wuthering Heights* by pure coincidence at the same time as Emily was writing a book of the same name.

However, this was the second version of the incident. He had previously stolen the opening chapter of Emily's book and read it to his cronies as his own work. It was only when he was disbelieved that he came up with the 'alternative version' account.

*What sort of scripts are automatic writers producing today? See page 447*



Left: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851), creator of *Frankenstein*, one of the most famous 'horror' stories. The plot of the novel came to her in a dream



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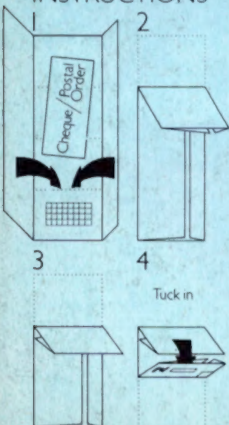


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